



# OLR RESEARCH REPORT

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## **OLR BACKGROUNDER: WELFARE-TO-WORK — ELIGIBILITY, BENEFITS, CASELOAD AND WORK REQUIREMENTS**

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This report briefly summarizes the state's welfare-to-work program, Jobs First.

### **JOBS FIRST**

The Jobs First program is the state's welfare-to-work program for needy families with children. It consists of the Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) cash assistance program, which the Department of Social Services (DSS) administers, and Jobs First Employment Services (JFES), run by the Labor Department (DOL). The federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant funds much of the Jobs First program; hence, the state must meet certain federal requirements, including ensuring that 50% of able-bodied adults in the TFA caseload engage in at least 30 hours of work-related activities each week.

### **TFA**

**Income Limit.** To initially qualify for TFA, a household's income must be under the maximum TFA benefit for the applicant family's size, plus \$90. For example, a family of three living in most parts of the state (DSS Region B) would qualify if their monthly income does not exceed \$666 (\$576 TFA benefit plus \$90). Once a family begins to participate in the program, its allowable income rises to 100% of the federal poverty level (\$1,590 a month for a family of three in 2012). As long as income does not exceed this level, the family can receive the full TFA benefit.

**Assets.** A family's liquid assets are limited to \$3,000. This amount disregards a car with up to \$9,500 in equity value and the value of the family's home. DSS generally places a lien on the house that allows it to recover the amount of assistance it provided when the family sells it.

**Benefit Levels.** TFA benefit levels are based on family size and the DSS region in which the family lives. In addition to regional payment rates, DSS reduces benefit levels by the amount families receive in rental assistance. When a child is born while the family is participating in TFA, the department increases the benefit rate by only half the amount it would pay if the child had been born before the family enrolled in TFA.

Table 1 shows the benefit levels for families with two to five members in each of the three DSS regions. (Region A includes Fairfield County; Region C contains much of northwestern Connecticut.)

**TABLE 1: TFA BENEFIT LEVELS**

<b>Assistance Unit Size</b>	<b>Region A</b>	<b>Region B</b>	<b>Region C</b>
2	\$544	\$470	\$470
3	674	576	568
4	786	677	660
5	886	775	751

Source: DSS

**Diversion Assistance.** Families who are otherwise eligible for TFA and face an issue that compels them to apply for assistance can apply for diversion assistance. This lump sum payment equals three times the monthly TFA benefit the family would normally receive (the three months get deducted from the 21-month limit). The applicant adult must be working or have a job offer that will begin within three months, have a solid work history, or have marketable job skills that will lead to employment. The goal is to possibly divert the family from ongoing monthly assistance by addressing a short-term need ([CGS § 17b-112g](#)).

**Exemptions.** The law exempts from both the 21-month time limit and the employment services requirements (see below) certain families in which the caretaker relative faces one of the following limitations and there is no other nonexempt caretaker relative in the household. Exempted are families with a caretaker relative who is:

1. incapacitated or of an advanced age;

2. needed in the home because of the incapacity of another member of the household;
3. not legally responsible for the dependent children in the household if such relative's needs are not considered in calculating the family's TFA benefit;
4. caring for a child under age one who was born more than 10 months after the family enrolled in the program;
5. determined by the DSS commissioner to be unemployable; or
6. pregnant or postpartum with a doctor's letter indicating that she is unable to work ([CGS § 17b-112\(b\)](#)).

Minor parents attending and satisfactorily completing high school or a GED program are also exempt. (These parents must participate in work requirements once their child is 12 weeks old.) ([CGS §§ 17b-112\(c\)](#) and - [688g](#)).

***Time Limits and Extensions.*** In general, families who are subject to JFES work requirements may receive up to 21 months of TFA benefits during their lifetime. But families who (1) have made a good faith effort to comply with the Jobs First work requirements and despite this effort, have total family income less than the benefit level or (2) have other circumstances beyond their control that prevent employment, such as domestic violence, can petition DSS for a six-month benefit extension.

In general, the DSS commissioner may not grant more than two extensions (for a total of 33 months) but there are exceptions, such as domestic violence or the adult having two or more barriers to employment (e.g., lack of available child care, lack of transportation) ([CGS § 17b-112\(c\)](#)).

In general, no non-exempt family may receive more than 60 months of TFA. (This is consistent with federal TANF rules.)

***Caseloads.*** DSS reports caseload data monthly.

Table 2 shows the number of assistance units receiving TFA during June 2012. It also shows the total number of benefit recipients who make up the assistance unit.

**TABLE 2: TFA ENROLLMENT (JUNE 2012)**

<b>Program Category</b>	<b>No. of Assistance Units</b>	<b>No. of Recipients</b>
REGULAR		
Time-limited	6,139	14,131
Exempt	9,537	17,224
<b>Total</b>	<b>15,676</b>	<b>31,355</b>
2-PARENT (CALLED UNEMPLOYED PARENT)		
Time-limited	1,184	4,037
Exempt	211	621
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,395</b>	<b>4,658</b>

Source: DSS, Active Assistance Units Report for June 2012

### ***Jobs First Employment Services (JFES)***

Unless they are exempt, able-bodied adults in households receiving TFA must be engaged in some sort of work activity for at least 30 hours per week as a condition of receiving ongoing TFA. The DOL's Jobs First Employment Services (JFES) program, together with community providers, works with clients to help them find and keep jobs, with the goal of helping clients become independent of TFA at the end of the 21-month time limit. To accomplish this, TFA recipients work with a DOL case manager to develop an employability plan.

**Allowable Work Activities.** Federal law prescribes the types of activities in which adults may engage. Participants must engage in "core" activities during the first 20 hours. For the last 10 hours they may also participate in non-core activities. Table 3 lists these activities.

**TABLE 3: ALLOWABLE WORK ACTIVITIES UNDER FEDERAL TANF LAW**

<b>Core Activities</b>	<b>Non-Core Activities</b>
Unsubsidized employment	Jobs skills training or education directly related to employment
Subsidized private sector employment	Satisfactory attendance in school or GED program
Subsidized public sector employment	
Paid work experience	
On-the-job training	
Job search/job readiness	
Vocational education training (up to 30% of caseload, 12 month limit per participant)	
Community service	
Providing child care for someone doing community service	

DSS workers conduct a Service Needs Assessment of the adult, which takes into account that person's background and current circumstances before referring him or her to JFES. The worker also reviews the individual's work history, education, child care, transportation arrangements, and other personal issues that could affect the employment plan's development.

***Activities in Which Clients Are Engaged & Work Barriers.*** The most recent DOL [report](#) on JFES shows that during May 2012, almost half (42%) of JFES participants were engaged in job search activities only. Just under 9% were working only, while 14.5% were working and engaged in other allowable activities. Less than 1% of clients were engaged exclusively in basic education.

The biggest barriers reported at the time the employment plan was developed were transportation, child care (child care subsidies are available for working participants), and a lack of a high school diploma.

***Sanctions for Noncompliance with Employment Plans.*** As required by federal and state law, DSS must reduce cash benefits of JFES clients who fail to participate in the employment plan's activities without good cause.

Specifically, DSS will reduce a family's benefits when a member of the family who is required to participate in a JFES activity fails to do so without good cause. The first instance of noncompliance subjects the family to a 25% reduction in benefits for three consecutive months. The second results in a 35% reduction in benefits for three consecutive months. Third and subsequent offenses result in a 100% reduction in benefits for three consecutive months.

Additionally, DSS must terminate benefits of a non-exempt family when the family member required to participate fails without good cause to (1) attend any scheduled assessment appointment or interview relating to the establishment of the JFES plan or (2) comply with a JFES requirement during a six-month TFA benefit extension. DSS will reinstate benefits in the first instance if the participant attends a subsequently scheduled meeting ([CGS § 17b-688c\(b\)](#)).

## **OTHER RESOURCES**

OLR report on education activities in JFES, [2011-R-0068](#)

OLR report on sanctions for noncompliance with TANF work requirements, [2011-R-0041](#)

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